

# Inaugural event memorable

**HISTORY WAS MADE, TEARS WERE SHED,** and the memories of those who served in the military were recounted as *Latino Perspectives Magazine* held its inaugural Honoring Latinos Who Serve Awards.

The event, Nov. 14 in downtown Phoenix, drew 300 people including such dignitaries as Gov. Janet Napolitano, Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon and Maricopa County Board of Supervisor Mary Rose Wilcox.

But the real heroes were the honorees themselves: Dr. Pete R. Dimas and Phoenix American Legion Post 41.

Dimas, a veteran of the Vietnam War, produced and wrote the script for the documentary *Los Veteranos of World War II: A Mission for Social Change in Central Arizona*. Post 41 was credited with helping Latino veterans challenge discrimination and segregation once they returned home from the battlefield.

The event got off to a rousing and historic start. Gov. Napolitano announced that Brigadier Gen. Hugo E. Salazar was the new adjutant general of the Arizona National Guard, replacing Gen. David P. Rataczak, who is retiring.

Salazar, who has served in the guard for the past 17 years – most recently as assistant adjutant general – is the first Latino to hold the post as adjutant general.

Napolitano stated the event encompassed what she had envisioned in the planning of the Raul H. Castro Institute.

Interwoven in the program were scenes from Dimas' documentary *Los Veteranos*. One poignant moment came when an interview with deceased Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Silvestre Herrera was shown.

In a skirmish with Nazi soldiers near the village of Mertzwiller close to the German border, Herrera lost both feet and part of one leg after stepping on a landmine and landing on another. Seated at one of the tables was the widow of one of Post 41's co-founders and former commanders, Ray Martinez.

As the clip finished, Martinez's widow held back tears as she recalled, "He (Silvestre) was such a good dancer as a young man. *Qué lástima.*"

There was much joy to celebrate as well as friends and relatives of those honored came from different parts of the country. A relative of "Lencho" Othon even made the trip overseas from Ireland.

As Dimas graciously accepted his award, he looked out into the audience and thanked those veterans in

attendance for all their contributions. There were also members of the Valley's fire and police departments as well as current soldiers from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

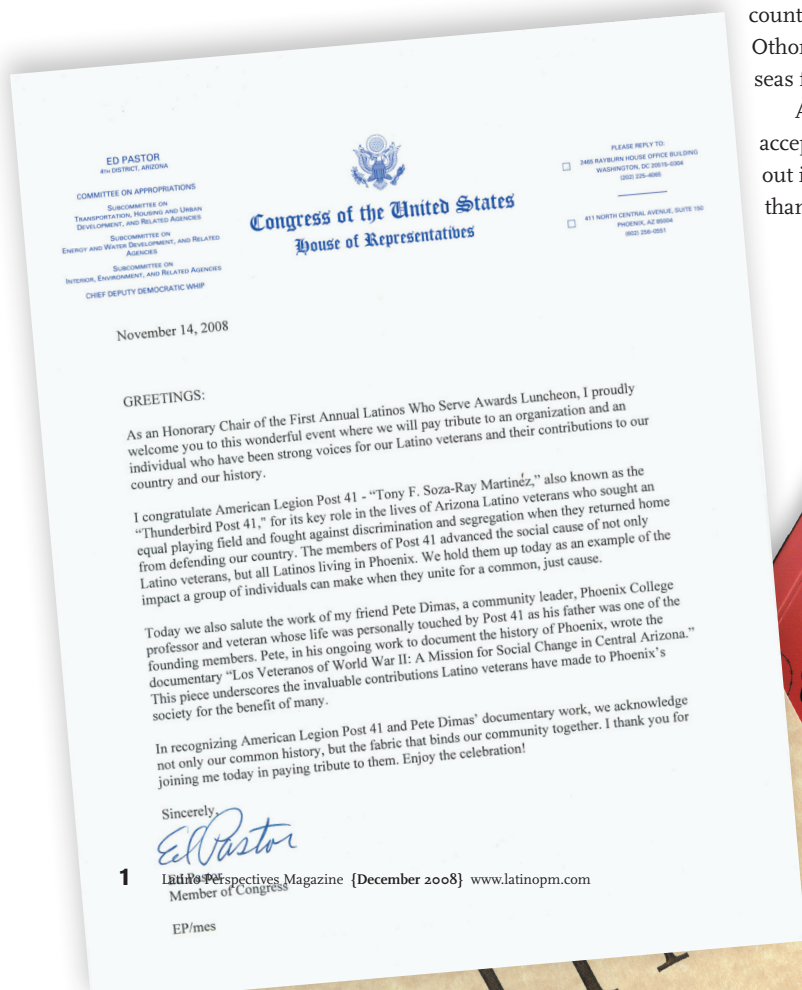
Several individuals who have been profiled in the monthly section "Latinos who Serve" were also in attendance, including Mesa Police Chief dGeorge Gascón; Martin Navarrete, from the City of Surprise Fire Department; Col. Alberto Gonzalez, Arizona National Guard; and World War II veteran and Bushmaster Steve Zozaya.

*Latino Perspectives Magazine* and the Raul H. Castro Institute co-published a book authored by Charles H. Sanderson on the history of Post 41: *The Faces of Post 41*. Copies of the book and Dimas' documentary will be donated to public libraries and high schools in the state. On hand to accept the donation was Richard Poutry with the Arizona State Library.

José Cárdenas, Arizona State University senior vice president and general counsel, and Anna Maria Chavez, deputy chief of staff for urban relations in the governor's office, served as Master and Mistress of ceremonies.

Other speakers included Tony Moya, SRP's manager of Latino Relations, who emphasized Salt River Project's commitment to the communities it serves, and Dr. Trino Sandoval, interim director of the Raul H. Castro Institute.

SRP was the title sponsor and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona and BBVA Compass were participating sponsors.



November 14, 2008

GREETINGS:

As an Honorary Chair of the First Annual Latinos Who Serve Awards Luncheon, I proudly welcome you to this wonderful event where we will pay tribute to an organization and an individual who have been strong voices for our Latino veterans and their contributions to our country and our history.

I congratulate American Legion Post 41 - "Tony F. Soza-Ray Martínez," also known as the "Thunderbird Post 41," for its key role in the lives of Arizona Latino veterans who sought an equal playing field and fought against discrimination and segregation when they returned home from defending our country. The members of Post 41 advanced the social cause of not only Latino veterans, but all Latinos living in Phoenix. We hold them up today as an example of the impact a group of individuals can make when they unite for a common, just cause.

Today we also salute the work of my friend Pete Dimas, a community leader, Phoenix College professor and veteran whose life was personally touched by Post 41 as his father was one of the founding members. Pete, in his ongoing work to document the history of Phoenix, wrote the documentary "Los Veteranos of World War II: A Mission for Social Change in Central Arizona." This piece underscores the invaluable contributions Latino veterans have made to Phoenix's society for the benefit of many.

In recognizing American Legion Post 41 and Pete Dimas' documentary work, we acknowledge not only our common history, but the fabric that binds our community together. I thank you for joining me today in paying tribute to them. Enjoy the celebration!

Sincerely,

*Ed Pastor*

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The ballroom fills up with guests as the luncheon begins



Tony Moya, SRP's new manager of Latino Relations



Col. Joey Strickland, director of Arizona Dept. of Veterans' Affairs



Christine Marín, right, curator and historian at the Arizona State Universities Chicano Archives collection



Firefighters post the colors, led by Alex Morales



Guests find their seats as the event begins



Col. Albert C. Gonzalez, of the 158th Bushmasters, seated at left, with former Bushmaster Steve Zozaya

